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STATE FOR AF/S JEANNE MALONEY

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TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [MI](#)

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT'S PARTY SWEEPS BY-ELECTION

REF: A. LILONGWE 914

[1](#)B. LILONGWE 937

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: In its first test at the polls, President Mutharika's Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) has won all six parliamentary seats up for grabs in the December 6 by-election. It is a huge win for the DPP and the President, giving Mutharika a vote of confidence from the populace and effectively legitimizing the DPP as a party. Observer teams organized by the U.S. Mission as well as domestic NGO monitors noted that while there were some irregularities, the elections as a whole were free and fair. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (U) Elections were held in three constituencies in northern Malawi, and three in the South, in order to fill parliamentary seats vacated by death or disqualification. While the DPP was expected to win in the North, its victory was a surprise in the South--an area long dominated by the President's former party, the United Democratic Front (UDF).

[1](#)3. (SBU) While the electoral victory doesn't dramatically shift the balance of power in the 193-member parliament, it has proved that the DPP is broadly supported and publicly popular. The election results are also a signal of voter mistrust of the UDF, which is associated with the corruption of the Muluzi regime, and the highly politicized attempt to impeach the president (reftels).

[1](#)4. (SBU) The U.S. Mission led a team of international observers that performed spot-checks at various polling stations in five of the six constituencies. Local elections monitors from civil society organizations and all the political parties were also present at each polling station. While the opposition has registered complaints regarding campaigning violations in the lead up to the election, the election itself seemed to be both free and fair. Neither the civil society monitors nor the international observers noted any major violations. In fact, the Malawi Electoral Commission took a more active role in attacking possible corruption than it had in previous elections.

[1](#)5. (SBU) Comment: The six seats the DPP won won't give it a majority in parliament; however, this election was important for other reasons. As the first election since the President resigned from the UDF and formed the DPP last spring, it is the first direct test of Mutharika's popularity. Moreover, the victory in both the north and south shows that the DPP could become Malawi's first nation-wide party since the advent of multi-party politics.

[1](#)6. (SBU) The DPP victory could also be politically damaging to the opposition parties themselves. A number of high-profile politicians involved in the losing campaigns had been eyeing the 2009 presidential race. However, their losing campaign efforts could knock them out of contention for their party nominations in 2009. At the very least, the DPP victory shows the UDF is vulnerable in the southern area

they've long dominated. End Comment.
EASTHAM